



June 12, 2020

We the undersigned, current and former Wisconsin Justices of the Supreme Court and Appeals Court Judges, join with justices of state supreme courts and judges of appellate courts across the country, including those in Washington, North Carolina, Louisiana, California, Massachusetts, and New Jersey, to address the recent events that remind us all of the systemic and institutional racism embedded in our country and our legal system.

This has been a time of reflection for many Americans. Yet, reflection alone is not enough. The anger and grief resonating across our country compel us to recognize that we must be part of the conversation as Americans confront the truth about these injustices and their long history in American culture.

For more than 400 years, people of color have suffered abject racism and prejudice in America. For much of our country's history, they have been fighting for equal rights in our schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, voting booths, buses, and healthcare facilities. And yet for all of the blood, sweat, and tears sacrificed to attain these rights, for many they remain elusive.

As leaders of Wisconsin's legal community, we need to recognize the ongoing injustices in our legal system and the systemic barriers that stand in the way of justice. If we are going to live in a country that is truly the land of the free, then we must have a judicial system where everyone is treated equally, fairly, and respectfully.

We can start by further educating ourselves. Issues like racism and oppression cannot be solved without understanding how they started and were perpetuated in America.

We must also acknowledge our own implicit biases and prejudices and see how they affect the interactions we have in our offices and courtrooms. We need to confront these biases with careful reflection in order to limit their influence on our interactions and decision-making.

We must support our colleagues of color, understand the challenges that confront them and value the gifts and perspectives they bring to our profession. We need to actively create a legal profession that reflects the people of Wisconsin. Through mentorship programs and recruitment efforts we also need to create a far more diverse bench and bar.

Although we cannot comment on specific cases, we also cannot turn a blind eye to the issues of racial disparity and mass incarceration. Too many people of color are behind bars in Wisconsin. We need to carefully consider treatment as a means of addressing issues of trauma, mental illness, and addiction.

Finally, we must increase access to justice for people of color in Wisconsin. The fight for equality often takes place in the legal system, and without effective representation, their voices often are not heard. By supporting programs that provide legal services and encouraging attorneys to provide pro bono representation, the goal of equal justice for all can be more readily achieved.

We are committed to a justice system that is fair and equal for all Wisconsinites. Such a system will exist only if we join with others, dedicating ourselves to engage in the hard work necessary to create it. We must meet this challenge together. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. proclaimed, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Signed,

Justice Ann Walsh Bradley

Justice Rebecca Dallet

Justice Louis Butler*

Justice Janine Geske*

Justice-elect Jill J. Karofsky

Appeals Court Judge Lisa
Neubauer

Appeals Court Judge Lisa Stark

Appeals Court Judge Daniel
Anderson*

Appeals Court Judge Kitty K.
Brennan*

Appeals Court Judge Brian
Blanchard

Appeals Court Judge Richard
Brown*

Appeals Court Judge Edward
Brunner*

Appeals Court Judge Patricia
Curley*

Appeals Court Judge David
Deininger*

Appeals Court Judge M. Joseph
Donald

Appeals Court Judge William
Eich*

Appeals Court Judge Rachel
Graham

Appeals Court Judge Paul
Higginbotham*

Appeals Court Judge Michael
Hoover*

Appeals Court Judge Joan
Kessler*

Appeals Court Judge JoAnne
Kloppenborg

Appeals Court Judge Paul
Lundsten*

Appeals Court Judge Jennifer
Nashold

Appeals Court Judge Gregory
Peterson*

Appeals Court Judge Paul Reilly

Appeals Court Judge Gary
Sherman*

Appeals Court Judge Margaret
Vergeront*

Appeals Court Judge Maxine
White